Two Addresses

By

HENRY W. SHOEMAKER

Some Extinct Pennsylvania Birds

and

Observations on Wild Animals

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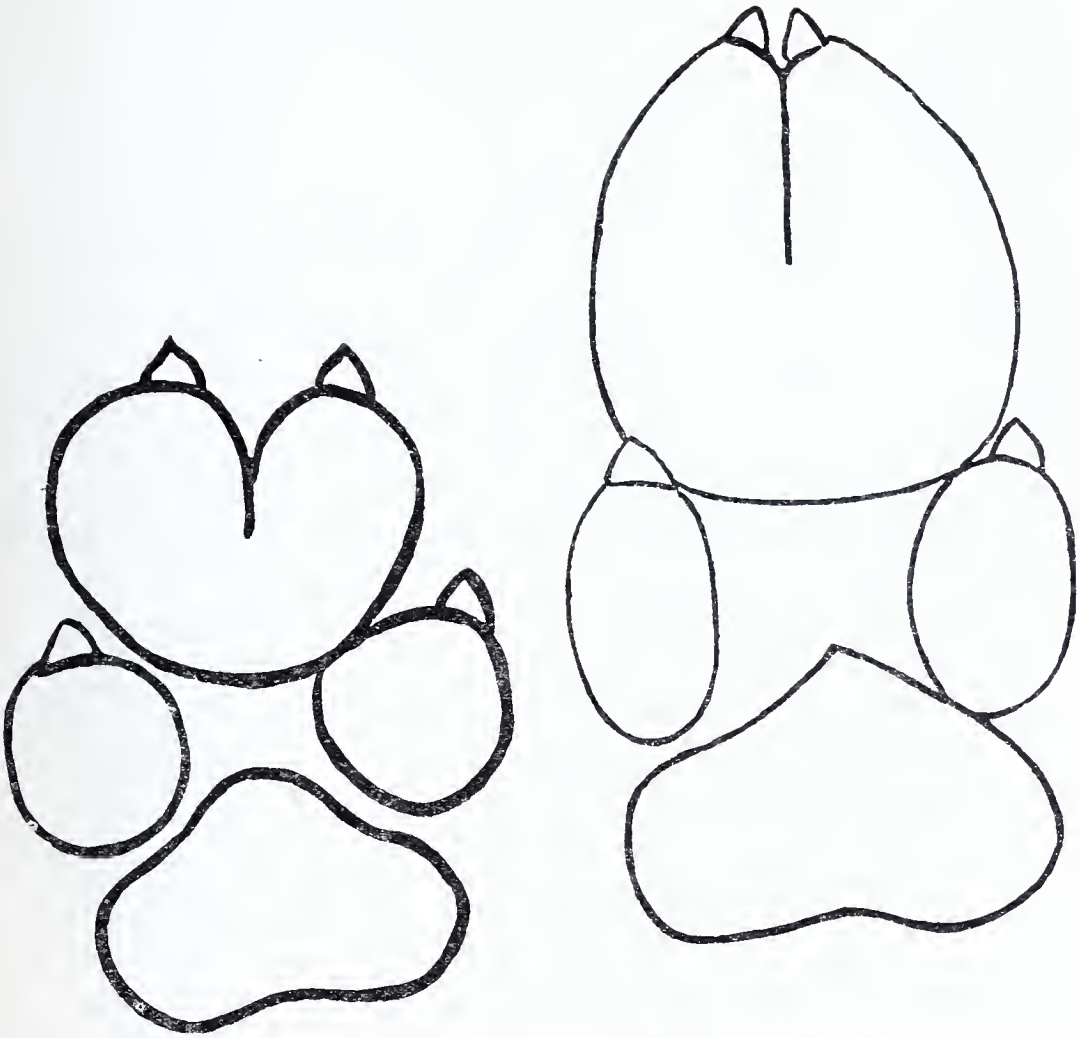

Sketches of Slot of Dog and Wolf, by J. E. Harting, F. Z. S., Premier English Naturalist, Author of "Extinct British Animals," Etc.

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Some Extinct Pennsylvania Birds

Mr. Gilmore, Prof. Rishel, Miss Wettlaufer, Miss Bubb, Members of the Audubon Society of the Williamsport High School:

Recently the newspapers of Central Pennsylvania were enriched by a widely copied article by that brilliant young exponent of Conservation, J. Herbert Walker, of Altoona, telling of his observations of a pair of Ravens which make their home in some of the wilder recesses of romantic Poe Valley, in Centre County, a very appropriate place for Ravens to frequent, for Edgar Allan Poe is said to have gone there at one time to seek a legacy from some well-to-do relatives for whom the valley was named. When Mr. Walker asked your speaker his opinion of the merits of the article in question he replied that it was the finest outdoor article that he had read for a year, if only it did not have the effect of sending a group of professional egg collectors into Poe Valley to disturb the ravens. Though the raven cannot today be classed as one of the extinct Pennsylvania birds, it is so rare that the great majority of persons living in the State have never seen one and probably many here this afternoon did not know of their existence and that they nest on the "Raven's-burg" and in several localities within a dozen miles of Williamsport. The raven is protected by law as it is a valuable insect destroyer and scavenger, and useful to the hunters, as on many occasions when deer which have been shot and got away and died later have been located by the circling of the sable birds. Never plentiful, they might still be with us in fair numbers were it not that there is a brisk demand for their eggs by collectors and the professional egg hunters have trailed them to their secluded nests on high cliffs, and pillaged them unmercifully. One individual, formerly of the State College faculty, deserves the credit, or rather the discredit, of having done more than any other agency to exterminate the raven in Pennsylvania. In an issue of "Cassiana", an ornithological magazine, he openly stated that he had visited a raven's nest two or three times in one season, every year for eight years, taking eggs

every time, until the parent birds, wearied and discouraged, abandoned the country. The raven, so immortalized by Poe's wierd poem, deserves protection, and it is the rising generations like are here today who will see that the remnant must remain unmolested. Up in Alaska there is a bounty of fifty cents on the American eagle, the bald eagle, or Bird of Freedom, and in the five years that this law has been in existence, nearly ten thousand of the noble birds have been slain, with scarce a word of protest from bird lovers in the United States. The bald eagle is accused of destroying game, hence the price on his head. If it has to be done,it should be fifty dollars, not fifty cents, for the sentimental, spiritual value of the Emblem of Freedom is beyond price. But the professional hunters who rushed this cruel law through the territorial legislature pre-judged the eagle before scientists had a chance to come forward with the exact information that, though it is sad to say, the Bird of Freedom lives mostly on dead animals and fish. His specialty is as a "cleaner-up", and if he ever takes a live fish he steals it from the osprey or fish-eagle. Yet apart from his food habits the bald eagle is altogether a noble bird, his proud appearance and lofty flight stamp him in every way worthy to be our bird of battle and liberty. Time was, not so many years ago, when the bald eagle was a familiar object all along the Susquehanna river, on both the North and West branches, on the Juniata, the Schuylkill, the Delaware and the Allegheny rivers. It was the especial joy of the raftmen, so the venerable Clinton County naturalist, John H. Chatham, tells us in his readable little book, "The Bald Eagle on the Susquehanna River", and their huge nests of sticks on the tops of tall trees, were always landmarks to the rivermen. Henry F. Charles, an old boatman, who lives at Port Trevorton, below Sunbury, tells us the shooting of the last eagles in his neighborhood by bird-stuffers, about twenty years ago, and how when the giant white oak on which they had nested, on the Isle of Que, near Selinsgrove, was felled, there were enough materials to furnish a wagon load of kindling wood, which was hauled to town by the owner of the tree, as a sort of unexpected dividend. Mr. Chatham tells us that it was an inspiring sight to watch the eagles soaring over the Clark's Ferry bridge, that wonderful wooden structure built in

1833 by the noted engineer, Theodore Burr, containing 1,250,000 feet of lumber, which has weathered every flood, 1846, 1847, 1865, 1889, 1894 and 1901, and was beautifully described by Charles Dickens in his "American Notes". "Pete" Owens, old-time hotel man at Liverpool, now dead, also described their majestic soaring over the Irish Sea, as the river with its "plumed islands", mentioned by Dickens, is called there locally. Pennsylvania protects the bald eagle, but many hunters shot them on sight just to see them struggling ignobly in the angry waters that they once ruled on their mighty pinions, monarchs of the storm. Rarer in Pennsylvania was the golden eagle, also a truly magnificent bird. It is nearly a hundred years since the last known nest on some high cliffs overlooking Muncy Creek, in Lycoming County, was pulled down and the two eagles shot and stuffed. Three golden eagles have been caught in traps at Otzinachson Deer Park, Clinton County, during the past twenty years, in 1901, 1903 and 1910, and the pity of it was they were not instantly liberated by patriotic hands; instead, they were foully put to death and their mounted remains can be seen in Williamsport. The harmony of nature is carried out as the Creator intended when an eagle is seen soaring majestically over some great sweep of country or water. In Berks County the turkey vultures have pre-empted the haunts of the eagles around the rocky summit of the Pinnacle, the highest point of the Blue Mountain chain, since the aquiline hosts were slain, and despite their efforts to float serenely in the high heavens, are referred to more or less facetiously as "Berks County Eagles". Probably the most curious bird to be exterminated in Pennsylvania was the so-called Carolina paroquet . In colonial days the early settlers viewed their migrations with superstitious awe. It must have been inspiring, the sight of thousands of the gaudily plumaged birds on the wing, and once near Albany,New York, at Christmas time, 1780, so the Pennsylvania naturalist, Dr. Benjamin S. Barton, tells us, a vast flight of paroquets in a blinding snow storm almost made the Dutch farmers go into hysterics, thinking the end of the world was at hand. In the winter months in the West Branch Valley the paroquets had a habit of lighting on corn shocks in immense numbers to satisfy their hunger, much as blue jays sometimes do on a corn crib today, and they were shot

off by the hundreds by the infuriated pioneer agriculturists. The early Pennsylvania Germans always illuminated their marriage certificates with sketches of the paroquet and the pileated woodpecker. Several early sketches and oil paintings of Pennsylvania Indian princesses show them with these native paroquets perched on their fingers, or on their shoulders, but the favorite bird with Indian and white girls alike of the early days was the Cardinal, the Baltimore bird as it was generally called, and no damsel of the long ago could afford to be without one of these sprightly and scarlet-hued pets, whose spring-time call "cheer, cheer, cheer," enlivens the dreariest "Blue Monday" morning. The Baltimore bird is almost extinct in Pennsylvania now. They were trapped for the market and sent to Philadelphia in huge hampers. Few seem to migrate here from the south anymore; they are too wise, perhaps! Many of the Carolina paroquets were slaughtered for their green wing feathers, which the pioneer girls wore on their bonnets, and the hunters at the shooting matches were never without the wings of a "Popinjay" as the mountaineers styled these birds, in their caps. The wings of the Baltimore birds were similarly employed, and prominent Pennsylvania Indians wore their skins as epaulets or facings for their buckskin hunting shirts. Another remarkable bird that is being fast made a thing of the past is the Blue Jay, of immense value as an insect destroyer, and of even more value to us spiritually for his weird cry in lonely mountain places; but he has the unhappy faculty of getting into fox and wild cat traps, and one trapper on "Oie Holle", near Spring Mills, Centre County—if we could recall his name it would be added to the roll of dishonor—boasted that he caught four hundred and eight of these beautiful birds last winter "on his trap line". We all know that the quail or Bob White is almost extinct in Pennsylvania, and the ruffed grouse or "pheasant", thanks to forest fires, bird dogs and automobile hunters, is going the same way; but many are not aware that there was another game bird, nobler than quail or grouse, the Heath Cock, called by the Indians Pab-ha-chu, which was exterminated before it was even taken cognizance of in our State game laws. As late as the time of the Civil War a few were still found in the northeastern part of the State along the Delaware

river, but hunting with dogs soon destroyed them, much the same way as they were exterminated on the pine flats west of Barnegat Bay in New Jersey a few years later. Only a few badly mounted specimens remain to remind us that Heath Cock was once a part of our avifauna. The older people of Williamsport can tell much concerning the passenger or wild pigeons, whose migrating flights spring and fall, over this city, used to shut out the sun. If any one in this audience has an elderly grandparent or uncle or aunt or other relative, please be sure and ask them tonight about the wild pigeons, and write out what they have to say, and bring it to the club, and in that way some new and valuable information concerning the greatest avian tragedy of the world may be obtained and preserved. Charles H. Eldon has a fine mounted male in his show window that was killed by Police Officer Jasper H. Fincher, on the Quinneshockeny in September, 1890, the last one killed hereabouts. There are several mounted specimens in Montoursville and other towns adjacent to Williamsport. But they were once so common that they sold, according to the late Mr. Charles F. Compson, in Williamsport market for ten cents a dozen, that no one thought of mounting specimens, though they were very beautiful birds. Mr. Eldon also secured several nets which were used to "fish" for them, as the netting operations were called, and they were captured on Grampian and other high points about this city by the tens of thousands. All the while they were being shipped through here to the eastern markets from their nesting grounds in the northern part of the State by the freight car loads. Latterly, about 1878, a law was passed forbidding any one to kill them in their nesting areas, but the hunters set their nets on every approach to the nestings, and caught the parent birds by the thousands. Now they are totally extinct; all we have are the few mounted specimens and a few feather ticks made from their down. One old lady, Mrs. Mary Nicholas, who lives on a property on the Germania Branch of Kettle Creek, Potter County, owned by Williamsport interests, said that as a girl she dreaded the approach of the pigeon netting season, as she and the other children of the household would be put to picking the dead pigeons to make "ticks, quilts and haps". They had to pluck feathers from before dawn to after dark until

their little fingers became numb and sore. Last year your speaker slept on one of these quilts and next morning found some of the feathers which worked out during the night. They are beautiful, all of different colors, and iridescent as a rainbow, after a lapse of fifty years. One of these is now on Governor Pinchot's famous old brown slouch hat that he wore all through the campaign and was inaugurated in! Mrs. Nicholas further stated that in 1876, in driving from Germania to Coudersport, after the spring pigeon netting operations, she frequently passed mounds of feathers "as high as the buggy top" left by the wholesale slaughterers. Daniel Ott, of Selinsgrove, an old pigeoneer who died a few years ago, said that in one day he trapped 1,300 wild pigeons which he killed first by crushing their skulls until his thumbs became sore, then by biting the heads until his teeth got loose. It was a cruel business, but no one was satisfied until they had killed the last bird. Near Larryville they were caught in such vast quantities that the farmers fattened their pigs on them. Daniel Ott told of aged women begging him for male birds which had the ruby-colored breasts to bury in their sweet-pea beds "to make the posies a deeper color". The wild swans which formerly frequented the Susquehanna are almost gone, because the gunners cannot resist shooting into the flocks. Last year a small group which rested on the dead water opposite Sunbury were decimated in this way. The great ungainly pelicans which formerly visited the West Branch above Lock Haven are seen no more, but perhaps it is the vile refuse from tanneries and paper mills that has driven them away. One April morning not so many years ago the banks of the West Branch near Jersey Shore were strewn thick with dead horned grebes or "dipper ducks" left there by a receding flood. These poor birds were "potted" by unscruplous gunners from the river bridge at Lock Haven and left to float down stream "as they were no good to eat". The late Jacob K. Huff, better known as "Faraway Moses", once wrote that if a new species of bird came to the Bald Eagle mountains and built its nest on the highest and most inaccessible crag, it would not be twenty-four hours before every nearby hunter would be out, shotgun in hand, and follow it until he had killed it. The great blue heron, that majestic wader and beautifier of our river scenery is often shot for "sport" as are the almost extinct white herons or egrets,

also bitterns, night herons, rails, snipe and other water birds. Equally persecuted are the hawks and owls, so useful as destroyers of rodents, but for thanks they are cruelly slain and crucified on barn doors. Thus bird life in Pennsylvania is decreasing fast, and only an aroused public sentiment can prevent all, except possibly the crow, which is a wise one to the point of uncanniness, from joining the mournful company into oblivion. Several years ago there was a craze to poison foxes and wild cats, a lazy man's method to secure their pelts; valuable forest birds like woodpeckers, flickers, chickadees, nuthatches, creepers and snowbirds ate the poisoned bait, and now many large areas of Pennsylvania woodland are without the cheerful company of these midwinter feathered friends. The forest fires take an awful annual toll of bird life; they simply cannot escape the engulfing flames, and the remnant that do cannot live amid the blackened stabs where there are no insects to devour. All honor to the Audubon Club members, Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, High School students and all who fight forest fires, for in addition to the various other benefits which accrue they are also saving the birds. Every fire in the woods means fewer birds, and without birds trees are handicapped, for the birds destroy the insect pests which hamper the tree growth. There could be no agriculture, no prosperity, without birds. Every species has its special task to perform, no other can do it; every variety exterminated means the inordinate increase of some insect or plant enemy of mankind, of agriculture, of trees, and flowers. Even pure water comes from birds to a considerable extent, for they clean out the dead fish or other polluting agencies, and as in the case of the halycon or kingfisher, destroy the young of water snakes, lizards and insects which live off the spawn of trout and other game fish. Man, with his guns, nets, dogs and poisons is the arch enemy of bird life . Every one of the extinct birds of Pennsylvania mentioned in this discourse was wiped out by man's agency. Yet in turn he can save the birds if he will, and it is up to this bright, new, enthusiastic generation that those of us who love the birds, who appreciate their infinite value look to, standing as a valiant guard to prevent the book of extinction to add any more to its blood-stained pages. Let us hope that the wastefulness of the pre-conservation days, pre-Pinchot days we might be permitted to call them, have gone

never to return, and the songs of the birds will be sweeter and clearer in a world of renewed hopes.

What can be more interesting than the study of birds and recording original observations, especially of the rarer varieties, for species which are with us now will be gone in the next generation. Sometimes birds declared to be extinct have merely dropped out of sight in some inexplicable manner. Many books on birds have stated that the crossbills are extinct in Pennsylvania, but when the Alpine Club visited the giant hemlocks on Swift Run, in Snyder County, now the Snyder-Middleswarth State Park, in November, 1919, twenty-three American crossbills were noted resting comfortably on a small yellow birch tree, close enough to the trail to be touched by the hand and made no effort to fly away while being closely scrutinized and admired by a hundred enthusiastic Alpinists. A marvelous photograph of them could have been taken, they were so near. Later, in January, 1920, the speaker saw a pair of white winged crossbills for an hour cracking the cones on a hemlock tree in front of his window. With face pressed against the panes he watched the deformed-looking bills in action . It was a fascinating sight, one possibly not to be seen again for years.* That same winter the fields were filled with prairie horned larks, driven to Pennsylvania by the severe Winter in the north; there were reports that the Moose Jay, or Canada Jay, was also a visitor to the North Tier Counties that Winter. The ways of the birds seem past finding out. Every year when an old white thorn tree at your speaker's home is in bloom it is covered for several days by swarm of cedar birds. Where they come from and go to is a mystery. The phenomenon of their migrations hold many unrecorded features. In the old days it thrilled even so great a mind as the great New England theologian, Cotton Mather, whose efforts to trace the wild pigeons in their migrations was so filled with baffling perplexities that he declared that when they left the North American continent they "repaired to some planet adajcent to the earth". Take a little time and learn to know the birds, and a great inspiration and happiness will come into your lives.

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*In February, 1923, Williamsport school boys within the city limits shot into what they thought was a flock of "sparrows." Picking up the victims they found that they had killed a pair of American Crossbills!

Some Observations on Wild Animals

Miss Wettlaufer, Members of the Science Class, Williamsport High School:

Last week newspaper readers in Central Pennsylvania were thrilled by a story under a Coburn, Centre County, caption, that the cries of a panther had been heard at night on one of the high points of the Seven Mountains, near that place, which seemed to indicate that the Pennsylvania lion had returned to his former haunts. As so few have heard the sounds of the panther, for they have been classed as extinct animals in Pennsylvania for a score of years, might it not have been the long-drawn out mournful wailing of one of the black wolves for which the Seven Mountains were famous, back in search of a mate? For several months Miss Lillian Sheffer, heroic girl fire warden, and fire tower guardian, was accompanied on her tours about the forests by a young timber wolf, which had been shipped east from the wilds of Wyoming, where it had been captured by one of the United States government trappers. When the Winter came in the Valley of the Karoondinha, now called Penn's Creek, and all was snowbound, the youthful wolf seemed to feel its lonelinesss to a marked degree, and at night would go to the highest mountain tops and pour out its heart to the frigid moon and stars. There came no answer to its long continued wailing; the wolfish tribe seemed gone forever, but Miss Seffer's sympathies were aroused and she sent her "pal" over to Clinton County to play awhile with its brothers and sisters.

It was not more than a night after the tame wolf's departure when the alleged "panther" was heard on the same mountain top, as if a wild wolf of the mountains had heard its mate too late! The voice of the Pennsylvania lion or panther was more of a roar than a cry, a wail, or a howl. Cornelius Karstetter, who saw two panthers pass through his field on the "Winter side" of Sugar Valley, Clinton County, in 1876, and watched them unob-

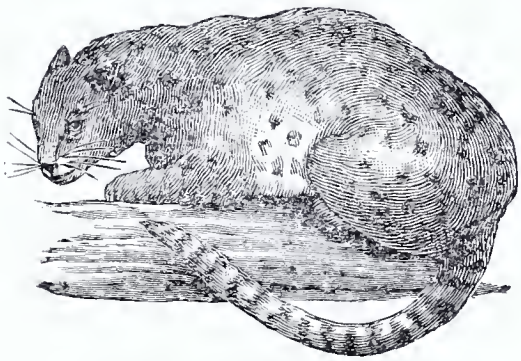
served through his kitchen window, said it was next to thunder the most inspiring sound in nature; the great cats braced themselves solidly and placing their heads near the ground emitted a roar which reverberated up and down the valley, literally could be heard for miles. Jacob Schreckengast, son of old Philip Schreckengast, one of the greatest of Sugar Valley hunters, said that this air-splitting roaring of the panther was one of the chief causes of its speedy extermination, by leading the hunters easily to its places of concealment. He said: "If a panther roared on the other side of Nittany Mountain all Sugar Valley would be aroused". The wolf's howling is in a minor key, wailing, pleading, sobbing "like a woman in anguish", so the article described the nocturnal sounds from the mountains above Coburn. Though we have not seen the author of the dispatch in question, we suspect it was from the pen of J. Herbert Walker, Scoutmaster, outdoor photographer, poet and the brilliant Secretary of the Pennsylvania Alpine Club, a youth who, if he lives, will rival the immortal Burroughs as a natualist.

Probably Mr. Walker's most noteworthy feat in nature photography was several years ago, when one day early in trout season he came face to face with a huge mother bear and several cubs, with only a log between them, on Rapid Run, near Lewisburg. The bear, supposing him to be a hunter out to kill, rose up and ground her teeth at the gritty young Alpinist. Undaunted, young Walker reached for his kodak, which was slung over his shoulder, and got a full-faced portrait of the black monster, showing her full set of teeth. Thanking her for this unusual opportunity, he went his way, and the forests were saved a bloody tragedy, to the bears. But to return to the black wolves of the Seven Mountains, they remained in that region long after lumbering operations were at their height and even came into Penn's Valley when they felt so inclined. Twenty years ago three of them came dangerously close to a man named Grenoble, one night while he was passing through the "Schwartzbach" hemlock grove between Millheim and Aaronsburg, as recorded in the Bellefonte Republican of that time. Several years before that, about 1898 or 1899, the main pack, owing to scarcity of game, no doubt, made an exodus to the North by the wolf's path, crossing Brush Valley and Sugar Valley, probably going over the Susquehanna River at Pine Station or Linden on

the ice and disappearing in the direction of New York State. The Adirondack wolves made a similar get-away to Canada when they were molested too much by hunters, so Dr. C. Hart Merriam tells us in his interesting work on the animals of the Adirondack region. The native wolves had left Brush Valley and Sugar Valley long before, in the same northerly direction, and some of the old people missed the wierd music they were so fond of dispensing when the nights were long and cold, their primitive radio program! Old John Engle, a pioneer Sugar Valley hunter who died in 1917, seemed to have the most romantic conception of the wolves, for on nights when the Northern Lights ,or as the Indians called them, the Dancing Ghosts, appeared above the Nittany Mountains, the aged hunter would hear a strange unaccountable echo like the distant howling of wolves; alone he would climb by the wolf's path to the mountain top and sit on a stump until almost daybreak, watching the brilliant flashes of the Aurora against the horizon and listening to the faint, far-off sounds like wolfish anguish away beyond the northernmost ridges of the Alleghenies. In May, 1908, the Millheim Journal told of a black wolf coming off Brush Mountain and crossing Penn's Valley in the direction of High Valley in the Seven Mountains.. Those who knew wolves and understood them found them docile and friendly. Many persons were followed by them ,and if they did not molest the wolves no harm followed. Jacob Quiggle, old time raftman of Pine Station, Clinton County, who died a few years ago at a very advanced age, said that as a little boy he and his sister were followed to school every morning by a handsome wolf, which would lie down on the snow under some bushes near the log school house and follow them home in the afternoons. They were so pleased that one evening they related to their father about the "beautiful big dog that followed them every day", but the watchful parent's suspicions being aroused, next morning he accompanied them, armed with a rifle. Presently the wolf appeared, grinning as if happy to meet his little friends; a well-directed bullet laid him low, despite the pleas of the tots that he had meant no harm. A wolf used to follow the packet boats on the old West Branch Canal, following the top of the Bald Eagle Mountains from Williamsport to Lock Haven, howling whenever the pilot would ring his bell. This is supposed to be the wolf

which followed a little girl named Stein through Antes Gap, when out for the cows, and gained her the title of "The Little Red Riding Hood of the West Branch"; when she was safely in the house she told her father, who seized his rifle, and rushing out organized a posse and soon located and slaughtered the wolf. The "packet boat wolf" was heard no more, answering the boatman's bell by his whimsical howling.

James Wylie Miller, a Clinton County Civil War veteran, when twelve years old, carried a full grown wolf, trap and all, two miles to his home at Sinnemahoning, the animal seeming to enjoy the "lift". If you wish to be convinced first hand of the kindliness and friendliness of wolves, you are all cordially invited to visit the speaker's home, it is not far from here, and see some genuine grey timber wolves, the brothers and sisters of Miss Sheffer's pet mentioned previously in this discourse. Whenever your speaker returns he is assured of a loving welcome from the wolves. They lie down on their backs to have their stomachs' tickled, and lick his face and hands, and he can put his hands down their throats, yet one snap from their powerful jaws could sever them instantly. They are full of play and gentleness, and allow themselves to be mauled by a German Police Dog, that they could quickly tear to pieces if they chose to lose their tempers. Police dogs make wonderful pets, their loyalty and companionship is inspiring, but for downright affection and gentleness the timber wolves have them outclassed. These wolves are not for "one man", as children from passing automobiles get out to have a romp with them. Not long ago they had a merry time playing with a herd of sixteen small red pigs, yet they are so quick that they can catch a pigeon or a guinea fowl on the wing! Dr. E. H. McCleery, of Kane, has a pack of pet timber and Buffalo wolves numbering about a dozen individuals; he goes into the cage and lies down and lets them pile up on top of him until it looks like a scrimmage in a football game. The leader of the pack, a great dark colored fellow from the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming is the biggest wolf the speaker has ever seen. Once the doctor got a new wolf, and when it attempted to run off with a big chunk of beef he tried to take it away; the wolf turned on him, and was about getting the best of him when the pack rushed at the newcomer and would have torn it to pieces had not Dr. McCleery intervened. Even now that wolf always

hangs back, as if ashamed of itself for hastily misjudging its new master.

One frosty night last winter a traveling man was waiting on the railroad station platform at Kane for a midnight express, when from among the tall, dark hemlocks at the edge of the town he heard the howling of the McCleery wolves . Turning to a railroader standing by he said: "Do I hear wolves howling?" "You certainly do", said the railroad man with a twinkle in his eye. "This is no place for me"', shouted the drummer, hurriedly gathering up his cases, and running into the waiting room and slamming the door. It is always best to wait a while, to study a little before condemning anybody or anything . Get to know the wild animals and the wild birds, your desire to kill them will grow less, and their presence in the great outdoors will become as indispensable to your happiness as the trees, flowers, ferns and mosses.